Radio and Television

TV Rebel Friendly Is Going Academic

By Lawrence Laurent

FOR SEVEN weeks, Fred W. Friendly pondered his future in television. He received job offers from two networks and from a dozen TV stations in large cities. He turned down all the offers because "I think I can do more good on the outside."

Laurent

Friendly quit in February as president of CBS News. He quit as a form of protest against a "business decision, not a news decision" made by his superiors on whether to cover Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings.

Now he has two jobs. On July 1, he becomes the Edward R. Murrow Professor of Journalism at Columbia University. He has also been hired as the Ford Foundation's consultant on television.

Not even with two jobs, Fred conceded yesterday over the telephone, will he even come close to the $125,000 a year he made as president of CBS News.

"But," he added, the two jobs complement each other and there's no law saying I have to be rich."

HE ADDED: "At the university, I'll get to work with young people. I might even be able to infect them with a few of those 'Murrow Microbes.'

"You know what I mean: A newsman really isn't doing a job unless he can make the body politic itch a little bit."

Friendly isn't one bit embarrassed by his worshipful attitude toward the late Mr. Murrow. He and Murrow fashioned some of television's most potent, most meaningful TV journalism. (In discussing his decision to quit at CBS, Friendly once said: "I had to quit right then. Or I would have heard Ed yelling his disrespect at me from the grave.")

FRED'S academic duties will include teaching TV treatment of basic issues, serving as chairman of the Broadcast Curriculum Committee and directing development of a proposed TV Workshop.

His duties at the Ford Foundation are not defined. McGeorge Bundy, formerly special assistant to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, now heads the Foundation. Over the telephone, I asked about Friendly's job and Bundy answered:

"I don't know what he's going to do. But I'd rather have him than anyone else."

Over the last decade, Ford has made grants of $106 million to educational television (ETV). By implication, at least, the Foundation may be taking a second look at ETV and may be considering a new role in commercial television. (You may recall that the Ford Foundation underwrote the experimental "Omnibus" series in the early 1950s.

Bundy did say that he wanted Friendly at the Foundation because of his combination of "experience, reputation for quality and high standing in his profession."

DURING Friendly's seven weeks of travel and pondering ("first chance I've had to do some thinking in ten years"), he has come to a few conclusions about television.

"We are in the middle of an electronics revolution," he said. "And we're getting ready for some major changes. I don't want to sound pretentious but, sometime during the next five years, someone is going to write an electronic magna carta. It will set the directions for the future."

Does all this mean that Fred W. Friendly has done his last television documentary? The answer was tinged with wistfulness: "I wouldn't say that. Let's wait awhile and see."